

April 23, 2009

Dear BTOP Team,

After submitting my comments on April 13 and 16, I have done a lot of thinking about Broadband Mapping and the Stimulus program. I am becoming increasingly convinced that a few questions about connectivity (AKA broadband access) should be included -- not just in the ACS (American Community Survey, formerly the long form of the US Census) -- but also in the Decennial Census itself. The reasoning that has brought me to this conclusion follows.

1. Because it is based only on a sample of the population and not a full census, the ACS can only produce solid results at the census tract level (or, in some cases, the block group). However, as the maps on my original document show (they are also attached to this note for your reference), these geographic units are too large to yield meaningful results in densely populated areas (e.g., most of the east and west coasts as well as all major cities and major metropolitan areas in other parts of the country, such as Chicago and Detroit).
2. For broadband mapping to become a useful tool in locating, diagnosing, and stimulating constructive action through universal access and job creation, the maps need to be accurate. Maps are most useful when a high degree of precision is achieved. Including in the full Census a brief set of questions about broadband access is the best way to do this. Naturally, the Census is only part of the equation (data from a variety of sources being essential the development of a full, fair and accurate view), but 'live' data from real people will increase the value of any mapping program several times over.
3. Collecting data directly from individuals is staggeringly expensive. The Decennial census is about to happen. No entity other than the federal government can possibly afford to conduct research on this scale. Since most of the cost of the research is due to the labyrinthine and labor-intensive process of data collection,<sup>1</sup> I imagine that very limited changes to an already-brief questionnaire would not, in the grand scheme of things, be a major factor. Moreover, it seems to me that the value of the information we will gather will far outweigh the incremental cost.
4. The Decennial Census represents such a wonderful opportunity to assemble the information base necessary to build good public policy, at precisely the time when it is most needed. To pass on this opportunity, which will not come again until 2020 - just because it is inconvenient, would be a sorry and self-injurious waste.
5. I know that no one person can make this decision, but there is a model in the form of the legislation passed by Congress mandating this very set of additions be included in the ACS (see [S. 1492 \[110th\]](#), section 103, part d) at the bottom of page three):

*d) Improving Census Data on Broadband- The Secretary of Commerce, in consultation with the Federal Communications Commission, shall expand the American Community Survey conducted by the Bureau of the Census to elicit information for residential households, including those located on native lands, to determine whether persons at such households own or use a computer at that address, whether persons at that address subscribe to Internet service and, if so, whether such persons subscribe to dial-up or broadband Internet service at that address.*

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<sup>1</sup> Here, I speak from direct personal experience.

In summary, I strongly urge NTIA leaders to be in touch with their colleagues at the Bureau of the Census; to encourage them to include questions about broadband access, accessibility, and cost in the Decennial Census. No other Census Bureau product - not the ACS, the Economic Census, and the Community Population Survey (CPS) - or any other - can provide the level of detail needed for a successful Broadband Technology Opportunity initiative. The 2010 Census represents a perfectly timed opportunity, one whose relevance and bearing on the economic future of our nation are simply too great to be lost for another decade.

Thanks so much for the opportunity to comment and to contribute my knowledge to this critically important effort.

Sincerely,

Sara C. Wedeman